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The Case Against Spiritualism

*The Case
Against Spiritualism*

BY
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HODDER AND STOUGHTON
LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

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The Case Against Spiritualism *Preface*

RUDYARD KIPLING, with his robust common sense, has warned intruders who seek to establish a traffic with discarnate beings that they are entering on a dangerous path.

“Oh the road to En-dor is the oldest road
And the craziest road of all.
Straight it runs to the Witch’s abode,
As it did in the days of Saul.
And nothing has changed of the sorrow
in store
For such as go down on the road to
En-dor !”

That old road has never been more crowded than it is to-day. The merchants who travel on it appear to ignorant onlookers

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laden with balm and spicery and myrrh. Owing to the propagandist activities of honoured men like Sir Oliver Lodge, Sir W. F. Barrett and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the cult of Spiritualism has received a new advertisement, and is proving itself, in certain quarters, a rival to Christianity. Its literature is growing rapidly, and the wish has often been expressed for a brief, comprehensive, up-to-date exposition of the arguments on the other side. This book is designed to supply that need. While the writer is well acquainted with the older historical works, both of Britain and America, the publications of the Society for Psychical Research, and the standard Continental treatises, these chapters deal mainly with Spiritualism in the war-period and after. The strongest arguments against "dabbling" are to be found, as will be seen, in the writings of Spiritualists themselves. Warnings are heard from many

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pulpits, though with the exception of Dr. Barnes in his admirable short pamphlet, "Spiritualism and the Christian Faith," none of our leading preachers seems to have grappled with the subject in detail. The writer may therefore claim to have broken new ground. "The Case Against Spiritualism" is set forth under many aspects, and it is hoped that the book may prove acceptable to Christian teachers, as well as to inquirers in general.

New Votaries of Spiritualism

The Case Against Spiritualism Chapter I

NEW VOTARIES OF SPIRITUALISM

EXPERT writers believed twenty years ago that Spiritualism was declining. The late Mr. Frank Podmore, about the time of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, called attention to the disappointing results attained by the Society for Psychical Research. The number of believers, he said, had been much larger in the seventies, and the things they believed much more difficult of acceptance. There was a time, he thought, when the number of avowed Spiritualists in this country and the United States might fairly have been reckoned by tens of thousands, but between

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1882 and 1897 (the first period of the Society's investigations) zealous students had been brought up against defeat. "No positive results," he said frankly, "have been obtained worthy of record." There was a "cooling-off" in public interest. Sir William Crookes, though a believer in Spiritualism, had seemed to discourage intrusive curiosity in a famous passage. "In such an inquiry," he wrote, "the intellect demands that the spiritual proof must be absolutely incapable of being explained away; it must be so strikingly and convincingly true that we cannot, dare not, deny it."

The truth is that Spiritualism breaks like waves on the modern world; and when each successive wave has spent its force there follows a period of lassitude. Can we wonder that a tidal wave should have followed the late war? Three classes, at least, have felt themselves strongly attracted towards psychical studies.

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I

There are, first, the idle, curious gazers who under the late Roman Empire would have been thronging to the worship of Isis or Mithra. Sir Samuel Dill and Dr. Reaveley Glover have painted these men and women, some of whom had great possessions. Their successors were found in Paris under the Second Empire, when society, for a short time, was bewitched by the revelations of Douglas Home. Neither time nor space, it was believed, had any existence for him. Through his means the spirits of St. Louis, Pascal, Rousseau, and even ancient Greeks like Aristides and Solon, were consulted, and if we may trust French memoir-writers of the period, they replied with touching alacrity. Père Lacordaire, the foremost preacher of his time, was almost deceived by the phenomena. He wrote to Madame Swetchine in 1853 that

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he had heard tables talk and made them talk. "They have told me some very remarkable things about the past and the present." "A poor and vulgar phenomenon," was his verdict, yet he did not think it was all imposture. The Roman Catholic Church, in our own day, speaks with sharper condemnation. Under the Second Empire, about the time of the Crimean War, table-turning and spirit-rapping were the amusements of every drawing-room. While our great war lasted the need for distraction was felt by those who in normal times are known as "the pleasure-loving classes." Individuals among these classes—hundreds, nay thousands, of them—were occupied to the limit of their strength in public service. Crowded theatres and music-halls proclaimed their need of respite and excitement. Spiritualism had its distractions to offer to the weary rich.

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II

It has drawn recruits, in the second place, from that large body of the middle and working-class population which has no link with any of the organised Churches. Mr. George Haw, writing in the *Daily News* census volume of 1904, gave a picture of Sunday as spent by non-churchgoers in greater London. Among the artisans "the day opens with an idle morning, divided between nap and newspaper. After a late dinner the afternoon sees a saunter, sometimes with wife and children, through the streets, or a walk into Epping Forest . . . or by the banks of the Lea. An early supper and a pipe close the day." That section of the working classes represented by clerks, shop assistants and warehousemen spent Sunday, as Mr. Haw had observed, in visiting and entertaining. "Thoughts of taking part in public worship are as far

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from their minds as thoughts of taking part in public life." "Games and concerts in their little parlours beguile many a Sunday night." Spiritualist lecturers to-day are teaching such people to "form home circles" for the evocation of spirits.

III

From all these classes, whether rich or poor, is drawn a companionship of the bereaved. It is from them that the new Spiritualism expects a multitude of recruits, for their eyes are looking towards the shadows. Sunday morning in greater London was once "a time for tending little gardens," but the boy who used to "help father" with his spade and pail may be resting now in a hero's grave by Somme or Tigris. Perhaps he has no sleeping-place, even among the undistinguished dead. His body may have been utterly obliterated, his end may be a subject for mysterious

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surmise. If the Churches cannot speak to the mourners words of Divine consolation, Spiritualism will rush in with its false and fatal comfort. Shallow writers have told us in recent months that "the dead are sleeping in their graves, already half-forgotten." So it seems, because life's routine proceeds as usual in homes where "one is not." If Mr. George Haw's description of the day of rest in outer London could be brought up to date, we should doubtless hear of nap and newspaper, country walk and evening concert, with a cigar as the breadwinner's treat in the after-dinner hour. But the clay cottage of materialism has begun to rock and crumble. Every incident of the war is marked and dated according to its bearing on the personal sorrow. Nor is it surprising that ignorant persons should brush aside contemptuously vague warnings as to the peril of dabbling in Spiritualism. There is no more superstitious

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peasantry in the world than that of Brittany, nor any with a darker array of ghostly legends. Yet we are told that on St. John's Eve, when the bonfire is lit and the priests and choir have gone past in long procession with banners and relics, places are set beside the glowing embers for those whose bodies are in the churchyard, that they, too, may look in at the dancers. In every land which war has visited arms are stretched out towards the young and beautiful who have fallen, and the cry is heard from mourners' lips, "I am determined to take the hazard of the night along with you."

IV

New inquirers are, for the most part, wholly ignorant with regard to the history of Spiritualism, which Mr. Waite, our chief living occultist, has called "a masque of anarchy." The most respectable leaders

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of the movement are only too anxious to break with the ugly, disreputable past. A well-known authority says in *Light* * : " It has been the misfortune of Spiritualism that many of its public expositions have been conducted in circumstances the reverse of dignified. It has suffered from contact with stupidity and cupidity, and its enemies have made the most of their numerous opportunities of holding it up to ridicule."

Just as the Government of Ebert and Scheidemann pleaded with the Allies : " The past is past ; the old bad system is gone for ever ; let us write on this clean slate," so the newer exponents of Spiritualism—even men like Sir Oliver Lodge and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle—seem inclined to pass over, *sub silentio*, all that was guilty and fraudulent in the records of seventy years. Such an amnesty could not be

* May 10th, 1919.

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granted in public affairs. The framers of the Peace Treaty of 1919 were guided in every step they took by a knowledge of the crimes committed by Germany during the war. The greater her misdeeds, the sterner were the guarantees required. "Take up the study of Spiritualism *without prejudice*," says the devotee to the ignorant new-comer. The words of Mr. Robert Hichens are in place, though they refer to the testing of individual character: "The question is, What is prejudice? The facts of a life are facts, and cannot leave one wholly uninfluenced for or against the liver of that life. If I see a man beating a dog because it has licked his hand, I draw the inference that he is cruel. Would you say that I am narrow-minded in doing so? If one does not judge men and women by their actions, by what is one to judge them?"

As with individuals, so with movements. "It is infinitely to be regretted,"

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says the French Spiritualist leader, Camille Flammarion, "that we cannot trust the loyalty of the mediums. They almost all cheat." Are we to pass over such a sentence as of trifling importance, or shall we receive it as a warning against all attempts to pry into the fate of our dead by unlawful and unholy methods? "The judgment, the estimate, *where they are*," wrote Bishop Francis Paget, "is formed with perfect knowledge, perfect love; and our loose guesses, our hasty impressions, our blundering words are like voices in the noisy street outside a church."

Disturbers of the Dead

The Case Against Spiritualism *Chapter II*

DISTURBERS OF THE DEAD

MODERN Spiritualism has its roots in Necromancy, a practice hated in all ages by sober and reverent minds. It was only the worst type of sorcerer, according to Mr. Waite, who attempted to communicate with the spirits of departed men and women. Mediæval magic had a by-path leading towards the abyss, "an abhorrent and detested branch, belonging exclusively to the domain of black magic." The alchemist was bidden by his rules to pray as well as work. The astrologer was taught that in the last resort there is a law of grace by which the stars are governed, that

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“Christ rules all things, even the stars.” Though poisoning alchemists, like Alasco, in “Kenilworth,” or star-gazers, like Galeotti, in “Quentin Durward,” deceived Courts and peoples with a pretence of superior knowledge, there was nothing actually odious to the human mind in their professed and ostensible business. Necromancy, as Sir William Barrett points out, incurred the reprobation of Hebrew prophets, the statesmen and men of science of their day. From Moses to Isaiah, says this writer, we find them united in warning the people against any attempts to peer into and forecast the future, or to meddle with psychical phenomena for this or any lower purpose. “These practices,” he says, “were condemned . . . irrespective of any question as to whether the phenomena were genuine or merely the product of trickery and superstition. They were prohibited . . . mainly because they tended to obscure

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the Divine idea, to weaken the supreme faith in, and reverent worship of, the One Omnipotent Being, whom the nation was set apart to proclaim." Sir W. F. Barrett quotes with approval the words of Sir George Adam Smith in his "Isaiah": "Augury and divination wearied a people's intellect, stunted their enterprise, distorted their conscience. Isaiah saw this, and warned the people: 'Thy spells and enchantments with which thou hast wearied thyself have led thee astray.' And in later years Juvenal's strong conscience expressed the same sense of the wearisomeness and waste of time of these practices."

It is fair to add that Sir William Barrett is convinced that the perils which beset the ancient world in the pursuit of psychical knowledge do not apply to *scientific* investigation to-day. Enough for our purpose that he lays emphasis on the warnings of

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Holy Scripture against intrusion into unhallowed realms.

How shall we explain the deep repugnance of the human mind, at its best and sanest, against any attempt to summon back the souls of the departed ?

I

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, in "The New Revelation," admits that the opponents of Spiritualism are guided in part by that strange instinct which warns men and women to keep off forbidden ground. The man who would violate a grave is naturally regarded with loathing. Dickens, in "A Tale of Two Cities," has drawn such a person in Tellson's outside porter, Jerry Cruncher. Jerry's good wife looks with horror on the night work of the body-snatcher, and Mr. Lorry says sternly to his employee: "You have had an unlawful occupation of an infamous description."

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With even deeper aversion does the unsophisticated mind turn from those who seek to rend the veil which hangs between this world and the next.

II

If the stern voice from Sinai says "Thus far and no farther," a tenderer reproach, breathed from earliest ages, warns presumptuous intruders who would disturb the dead. Here, again, we venture to quote the words of Mr. Waite: "There was a very strong and prevailing impression that the dead were at rest, and that the attempt to disturb that rest was a monstrous profanation." Tennyson's lines express the feeling of bereaved hearts, even where there was no hope of survival, in lands where Christianity was unknown:

"Sleep sweetly, tender heart, in peace:
Sleep, holy spirit, blessed soul,
While the stars burn, the moons increase,
And the great ages onward roll.

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“Sleep till the end, true soul and sweet.
Nothing comes to thee new or strange.
Sleep full of rest from head to feet ;
Lie still, dry dust, secure of change.”

Many sayings of Scripture confirm the Christian's assurance that the faithful dead, having passed the waves of this troublesome world, are at rest in their desired haven. Newman's words on the calm of Ascensiontide belong in part not only to the exalted Saviour, but to each of His brethren now absent from the body : “He is in the very abyss of peace, where there is no voice of tumult or distress, but a deep stillness—stillness, that greatest and most awful of all goods which we can fancy—that most perfect of joys, the utter, profound, ineffable tranquillity of the Divine essence. He has entered into his rest.”

Jesus said : “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth ; I go that I may awake him out of sleep.” St. Paul wrote : “I would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning

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them that are asleep.” The Church does not interpret these and other passages as teaching that the dead are wrapped in profound unconsciousness, or that they are wholly unconcerned with dear ones left on earth. New activities may claim their interest, while old memories remain alive.

“For the breed of the Far-going,
Who are strangers and all brothers,
May forget no more than others
Who look seaward with eyes flowing.”

But the New Testament use of the word “sleep” ought at least to warn us against meddling with their sacred rest.

III

Spiritualist teachers are not without a sense of the impropriety of such attempts, when pressed on grounds of curiosity alone. Sir William Barrett advises that those who have attained the assurance of survival by means of the séance should not pursue the

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matter further, but rather learn more of the spiritual world and spiritual communion from the Christian mystics of all countries. He recommends especially a study of the writings of Swedenborg. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, unlike Sir W. F. Barrett, regards Spiritualism as a religion, but he advises his readers to get away from the phenomenal side, and learn the "lofty teaching" from such books as those of Stainton Moses. The cult of the séance, he says, may be very much overdone. "When once you have convinced yourself of the truth of the phenomena, the physical séance has done its work, and the man or woman who spends his or her life in running from séance to séance is in danger of becoming a sensation-hunter." In all such writing there is a note of uneasiness. The séance is not regarded as a "means of grace" for the believer in Spiritualism, therefore the outsider should avoid these dark and perilous ways. "Not

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for nothing," says the Rev. Cyril E. Hudson, "has the Church throughout her history discouraged the practice of necromancy, the morbid concern with the dead which must inevitably interfere, and does in fact interfere, with the proper discharge of our duties in that plane of existence in which God has placed us."*

* *Nineteenth Century*, May, 1919, p. 919.

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The Case Against Spiritualism Chapter III

THE MEDIUM

IN ordinary trance-mediumship, at least four distinct entities are involved. There is first the inquirer, next the medium, thirdly the medium's alleged "control" or controlling spirit, and, lastly, the presumed discarnate being who speaks to the inquirer through the "control" and through the medium.

I

"Mediumship" is a word with ugly associations, as every honest-minded Spiritualist will admit. It used to be said that the Psychical Society found its

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chief occupation in exposing fraud and trickery. The great Russian authority, Aksakof, complained bitterly of the frequent transmission of obviously false messages. He wrote of "the deception which appeared along with the dark séance and materialisations, and which was confirmed in my experience, not only from literature, but also through my personal relations with the most celebrated professional mediums." He would have agreed with Mrs. Sidgwick's words: "The chief scandal of Spiritualism is the encouragement it gives to the immoral trade of fraudulent mediumship."

On that point, inquirers should note, there is no dispute at all among responsible investigators. In the earlier stages of the movement exposures were so numerous that a theory was evolved to account for them. It was admitted that in many cases the medium cheated, but it was alleged that this was done unconsciously, and that the

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fraud was really perpetrated from the other side. The late Professor De Morgan wrote of certain phenomena: "If these things be spirits, they show that pretenders, coxcombs and liars are to be found on the other side of the grave as well as on this." The idea was also elaborated that an uncongenial "circle" might induce bad spirits to play tricks with the medium.

"The cheating medium," as Mr. Waite puts it, "was sure of his defence. He was caught red-handed, but it was the ill-conditioned circle that attracted the 'unprogressed spirits' to tempt him. He carried the baggage of a conjuror on his tours, but the real infamy rested with the persons who had dared to trespass on the liberty of the subject by ransacking his private effects." Kind-hearted men and women would make any excuse rather than admit that a favourite "psychic" had been guilty of conscious deception.

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Since the bad side of mediumship is admitted, it is needless to re-array the historic evidence. Let us turn from the past to the present, and ask what has been the cumulative effect of so many disastrous exposures on the leaders of the Spiritualist movement in our own day.

II

Four names stand out on that side as specially authoritative : Sir W. F. Barrett, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Mr. J. Arthur Hill, and Sir Oliver Lodge. Three of these men are eminent in the worlds of science and literature, while the Spiritualistic writings of Mr. Hill deserve attention for their knowledge, fairmindedness and sanity.

(1) Sir William Barrett refrains from citing any evidence obtained through paid professional mediums, and has evidently a low esteem for this class. He welcomes the

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action of the Psychical Society in clearing off "a number of those detestable professional rogues who prey on the grief and credulity of mankind."* The very word "medium," he acknowledges, is usually associated in the public mind with various degrees of rascality, and he says emphatically that "so long as paid mediums and dark séances are encouraged, and rogues and fools abound, the evil odour which surrounds the name 'medium' is likely to remain."

He also recognises that many so-called communications from the unseen are merely the unconscious revelation of the medium's own thoughts, or latent memory, or subliminal self.* Even with honest "psychics" there is a natural tendency not to disappoint the sitter when a fee is paid, "and the temptation arises to supplement genuine by spurious phenomena."

* "On the Threshold of the Unseen," p. 124 (1918).

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Super-normal gifts, in the view of our most experienced authority, are rare and elusive, and require patience, knowledge and discrimination on the part of the inquirer.* Sir William Barrett dissuades uninstructed persons from resorting to mediums; and it is clear that he desires the total elimination of the commercial element.

We need to guard against self-deception, he thinks, even in people whose character is beyond reproach.

(2) Sir Arthur Conan Doyle greatly dislikes the commercial element in mediumship. In a letter to *Light*† he pleads for the “training and segregation of mediums.” Like Sir William Barrett, he condemns the whole system of paying by results. “It is only when the professional medium can be guaranteed an annuity which will be independent of results,” he says, “that we can

* “On the Threshold of the Unseen,” p. 257 (1918).

† May 10th, 1919.

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eliminate the strong temptation to substitute pretended phenomena when the real ones are wanting." He points out that mediumship in its lowest forms is a purely physical gift, with no relation to morality.

(3) Mr. J. Arthur Hill, as Sir A. Conan Doyle tells us,* has been for many years an invalid, stretched on his back in bed. A strong and athletic young man, he was suddenly reduced to absolute helplessness by a heart-wrench sustained while cycling up a hill. The volumes he has written under sad physical disabilities are among the most influential now read in Spiritualist circles, and their quiet, unfanatical tone commends them to outsiders. Mr. Hill, like the late Frank Podmore, whose place he has partly taken as the historian of the movement, has a thorough knowledge of the older literature and journalism, both American

* In the Introduction to Mr. Hill's book entitled "Spiritualism, its History, Phenomena, and Doctrine" (Cassell).

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and British. He admits deliberate fraud on the part of professional mediums, and is sceptical with regard to "materialisation." It is not unlikely, in his opinion, that sitters who await, in darkness and expectancy, the appearance of discarnate personalities, may "pass into a mental state not quite normal, and closely analogous to hypnosis."

Mr. Hill thinks it inevitable that doubt should linger in the mind when the financial element enters at all into mediumship, and he advises that this element should be eliminated as far as possible. He discusses very frankly the evidence obtained from non-professionals. "We have subliminal memory to deal with, and that is more difficult to exclude than ordinary fraud."

The best class of Spiritualist teachers are fully aware of the attitude of caution imposed upon them by the gradual progress of medical investigation into the workings of the unconscious mind.

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“ One of the principal difficulties in the way of admitting an element of supernormality—whether telepathy, clairvoyance or communication from the dead ”— remarks Mr. Hill,* “ is the unknown reach of subliminal memory. . . . Great care is necessary as to what we say to sensitives who are helping us in experimentation, also close knowledge of their lives, their reading, their associations, in order to estimate the probability or improbability of this or that piece of knowledge ever having reached them through normal channels.” He advises inquirers to err on the safe side, setting aside as non-evidential anything that the sensitive may reasonably be supposed to have ever known.

(4) Sir Oliver Lodge regards the medium as “ a delicate piece of apparatus, wherewith we are making an investigation.” “ The medium is an instrument whose ways and

* “ Spiritualism,” pp. 127, 128

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idiosyncrasies must be learnt, and to an extent humoured, just as one studies and humours the ways of some much less delicate piece of physical apparatus turned out by a skilled instrument maker."

These words of Sir Oliver Lodge raise a serious question. Do our investigators care enough about the moral and physical injury which the "sensitive" may suffer under the trance condition? Sir William Barrett notes that D. D. Home suffered severely after a long series of séances. According to the testimony of Sir W. Crookes, he lay pale, speechless and almost fainting on the floor, "showing what a drain on his vital powers was caused by the evolution of the 'psychic force.' " The Rev. Walter Wynn, in "Rupert Lives!" says of a medium that it took nearly ten minutes for him to pass under control "after many strange bodily contortions which are not pleasant to witness, but are quite natural if we are to

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assume that a discarnate spirit controls his body.”

Prostration occurred, as the New Testament records, when our Lord cast a spirit out of some poor human frame. The liberated were restored by Him to normal health and vigour. St. Mark's words are in strange contrast to the recurrent trance experiences of modern mediumship. “And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him, and he was as one dead, insomuch that many said, He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.”

Would He not lift up and restore and revitalise those who at the séance seem to ignorant onlookers to be invaded by some alien personality ?

The Medium's "Control"

The Case Against Spiritualism Chapter IV

THE MEDIUM'S "CONTROL"

PROFESSOR JACKS remarked in a recent address* that the whole problem of Spiritualism is largely centred in the "controls." The "control" professes to be the spirit of some departed person, which has taken possession of the entranced medium, and which causes the medium to speak or write in an abnormal manner. Sir Oliver Lodge writes of "a separate intelligence . . . which some think must be a secondary personality—which indeed certainly is a secondary

* At Denison House, Vauxhall Bridge Road, on June 11th, 1919.

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personality of the medium."* Elsewhere he states very clearly the divergence of view among psychical students with regard to this mysterious entity. "This personality," he says, "is believed by some to be merely the subliminal self of the entranced person, brought to the surface, or liberated and dramatised into a sort of dream existence, for the time." Others think we have here a case of dual or multiple personality, while a third section believe it to be in reality the separate intelligence it claims to be.†

I

It is hardly surprising that Spiritualists should differ among themselves as to the nature of the controls, for some of these controls are very curious people. Let us consider, for instance, the group which

* "Raymond," p. 86.

† *ibid.*, p. 357.

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appears in "Raymond." One of the most active is "Moonstone," who tells inquirers that he was a Yogi, who lived as a hermit on earth, "a good life, but a selfish one." He now desires to help humanity, "and so that is why I came back to my Medie, and try to bear through him the sorrows of the world." Another control is "Redfeather," who is apparently of North American Indian origin, though this is not distinctly stated. At one point the spirit of the supposed Raymond says, "Chap with red feather helping."* "Redfeather" remarks when first taking command, "I come dis little minute to try experiment. If we succeed, all right; if we don't, don't mind. . . . Who could help better than me? . . . Long ago I was killed."†

To relieve the tension of a strongly emotional scene which follows, an old Irishwoman named Biddy takes control.

ibid., p. 235.

† *ibid.*, p. 166.

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She begins: "Sure it's meself that has come to speak. Here's another mother. . . . I come to help to soothe the nerves of the medium. . . . I was a washer-woman, and lived next a church, and they say cleanliness comes next to godliness! One of my chains is to help mothers."

Most singular of all the controls in "Raymond" is the Oriental girl "Feda," who in her broken language talks of "Yaymond," and pronounces three-syllabled words in a careful and drawn-out manner. The controls, as Dr. Jacks says, are often remote people, and he mentions the case of an Egyptian priest belonging to the time of one of the Pharaohs.

What are we to think of "Dr. Phinuit," that singular control of Mrs. Piper, who described himself as a French doctor born at Marseilles about 1790? He gave particulars of his birth, education, and life in

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Paris, where, according to his own account, he died about 1860. Enquiries failed to reveal any trace of his existence. He gave no indication of possessing any scientific knowledge of medicine. More surprising still, his knowledge of French appeared to extend only to a few simple phrases, which might have been familiar to the medium. As Mr. J. Arthur Hill remarks, "The French doctor spoke no more French than Mrs. Piper herself might be supposed to know."*

How many Spiritualists believe to-day that William Grocyn, the teacher of Erasmus, acted as a control to Mr. Stainton Moses? Or that the group of Broad Church controls—Imperator, Rector and the rest—who inculcated their theology through the mediumship of Mr. Moses, afterwards invaded the personality of Mrs. Piper?

* "Spiritualism," p. 74.

The Medium's "Control"

II

Responsible leaders of the Spiritualist movement incline to a verdict of Not Proven, while impartial students, among whom Mrs. Sidgwick is pre-eminent, have expressed the strongest doubts as to the real nature of the controls. Writing of Mrs. Piper's trance phenomena (which were closely observed by experts) Mrs. Sidgwick says that the trance "is probably a state of self-induced hypnosis in which her hypnotic self personates different characters either consciously and deliberately or unconsciously and believing herself to be the person she represents, and sometimes probably in a state of consciousness intermediate between the two." Sir William Barrett also believes that the messages "often spring from, and are invariably influenced by, the medium's own sub-conscious life."*

* "On the Threshold of the Unseen," p. 33.

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with Mrs. Sidgwick, and he gives examples of absurd communications. Thus, in a sitting with Mrs. Piper, in 1899, the Jewish lawgiver Moses purported to communicate, and prophesied a great war in the near future, in which Russia and France would be on one side, Britain and America on the other. Germany, according to "Moses," would not take any serious part in the war.* Another time "Sir Walter Scott" announced to Dr. Hodgson that he had visited all the planets and could give information about Mars. "Asked if he had seen a planet further away than Saturn, the *soi-disant* novelist answered, 'Mercury.' " Julius Cæsar, Madame Guyon and George Eliot were personated, and George Eliot is reported as saying: "I hardly know as there is enough light to communicate," and "do not know as I have ever seen a haunted house."

* *ibid.*, p. 240.

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Mr. J. Arthur Hill says: "I am not convinced that the regular trance-controls are spirits at all." His views on certain aspects of the problem may be gathered from the following passage: "At Spiritualist meetings a trance-control or inspirational speaker will sometimes hold forth with surprising fluency at incredible length. The secretary of the Spiritualists' National Union once backed the late W. J. Colville to talk 'till this time next week without intervals for meals,' yet with a dullness and inanity that would drive any but a very tolerant audience mad. Spiritualists certainly have the virtue of patience."*

Mr. Hill thinks it probable that in many mediums there is a dissociation of consciousness, and no external spirit-agency at all. He warns Spiritualist societies against "encouraging the flow of

* "Spiritualism," p. 172

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platitudinous or almost meaningless verbiage which, whether it comes from a medium's subliminal or from a discarnate spirit, can hardly be helpful to anybody, and must be very bad for the minds of most hearers." He admits that in "at least some cases of trance-control there is no reason to believe the control to be other than a subliminal fraction of the automatist's mind."

How can the impartial inquirer hope to discern the truth amid heaps of lies? The cheating medium could be detected and cast out; the "controls" are as irresponsible as the fairies of "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

Sir Oliver Lodge's views on the "controls" are of extreme interest, though he is fully committed to the defence of Spiritualism. "The *dramatic semblance* of the control," he says, "is undoubtedly that of a separate person—a person asserted to be permanently existing on the other side,

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and to be occupied on that side in much the same functions as the medium is on this." It is true, he admits, that in the case of some mediums "there are evanescent and absurd obtrusions every now and then, which cannot be seriously regarded. These have to be eliminated, and for anyone to treat them as real people would be ludicrous."* The excuse given for their appearance is that the medium may be "overdone or tired." Sir Oliver Lodge advises "sitters," nevertheless, to "humour" the controls by "taking them at their face value." With the utmost respect for so great a scientist, the task of discrimination, we may safely say, lies beyond the capacity of ordinary men and women. Sir Oliver Lodge thinks that "the more responsible kind of control is a real person," and he has much to say of "the serious controls," but he admits the occurrence of

* "Raymond," p. 357.

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"mischievous and temporary impersonations."

The question may fairly be asked, Cannot the fourth personality in that strange group—composed of the inquirer on this side, the medium, the medium's control, and the spirit communicator—speak directly from within the veil? Sir Oliver Lodge, while admitting that an exceptional more direct privilege is occasionally vouchsafed to persons in extreme sorrow, gives his answer, on the whole, in the negative. The normal process "involves the activity of several people," and we conclude from his writings that he desires to uphold professional mediumship.

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TABLE PHENOMENA

TABLE-TURNING, as we meet it in literature, belongs to the older class of parlour games. Sir W. F. Barrett quotes the testimony of Delitzsch that it was practised in Jewish circles in the seventeenth century: "the table springs up even when laden with many hundred-weight." Zebi, in 1615, defended the practice as not due to magic, but to the power of God, "for we sing to the table sacred psalms and songs, and it can be no devil's work where God is remembered."

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I

Mrs. De Morgan, in that curious book, "From Matter to Spirit," describes her experience in table-turning circles about the year 1853. The medium was Mrs. Hayden, whose séances in West London were attended by such men as Professor Huxley and Robert Chambers. Mrs. Hayden was an educated lady, the wife of W. R. Hayden, editor of the *Star-Spangled Banner*. Her rooms were crowded with visitors, at a minimum fee of half a guinea each, and her services were in great demand for evening parties and private sittings. According to Mrs. De Morgan, the circle gathered round an old Pembroke table. The illustrations in the book show a spirit appearing to a man and woman who are seated at a rather large round table. Very strange and absurd communications, as Mrs. De Morgan admitted, were given by table-tipping, "as,

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indeed, by all methods." "I have seen instances," she writes, "and been told of others, in which long incongruous strings of names and titles have been spelt out, such as Richard Cœur de Lion, Pythagoras, Byron, Cheops, and Mr. Fauntleroy, the list, perhaps, ending with T. Browne or J. Smith. The givers of these names seem to delight only in buffoonery and abuse; and, perhaps, after playing absurd and mischievous tricks for days or even weeks, will seem to come in a body, giving all their names, with the information that they are come to say good-bye for ever."

Phenomena not unlike the "exuberant" table activities at Mariemont, as described in "Raymond," were familiar over half a century ago to the sitters with Mrs. Hayden. Mrs. De Morgan tells of a case in which the watchers were directed by raps to join hands and stand up round the table without touching it. They stood patiently

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for a quarter of an hour, and just as one or two of the party talked of sitting down, the old table “moved entirely by itself as we surrounded and followed it with our hands joined, went towards the gentleman out of the circle, and literally pushed him up to the back of the sofa, till he called out ‘ Hold, enough ! ’ ”

Robert Chambers, who was a close examiner of the table phenomena of his day, formed an opinion which would be accepted, as we shall show, by thoughtful writers of our own time who are on other grounds believers in Spiritualism.

“ I am satisfied,” Robert Chambers wrote in *Chambers’s Journal*, “ that the phenomena are natural, but to take them in I think we shall have to widen somewhat our ideas of the extent and character of what is natural.”

In 1853 a committee of British medical men held an investigation on table-turning.

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They decided that the table-motion was due to muscular action, mostly exercised unconsciously. Faraday, as Mr. Podmore shows in "Modern Spiritualism," was able to prove that the table movements were due to muscular action, exercised in most cases without the consciousness or volition of the sitters. Table-turning, in the remoter towns and villages of Europe, was a favourite drawing-room amusement as late as 1876.

II

Sir Oliver Lodge, in his deeply interesting address to the Dublin section of the Society for Psychical Research,* delivered more than ten years ago, spoke wise words on the physical phenomena of the séance. "There is but little doubt in my mind," he says, "that such movements do take

* Fully reported in the Journal of the S.P.R. for December, 1908.

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place ; I have had personal experience of them. Nevertheless they are not yet really established as facts, and if they were there would still be a question whether these movements are due to some independent intelligent agency, or whether, as is most likely, they are an extension of the ordinary power of the organism through which they are produced."

Sir Oliver Lodge, eleven years ago, took practically the same view as Robert Chambers in 1853. "I can move this tumbler with my hand," he said, "but the question remains whether I can move the same tumbler at a distance of a couple of feet from my hand without actually touching it. Note that there is nothing inconceivable about this. The boundary of an organism, as of everything else, is more or less arbitrary ; we know that in a sense a vortex ring exists, not only where it is seen, but at some distance also, and that the

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influence of every atom extends throughout the visible universe. And so, perhaps, on analogous lines, we may look for some explanation of these curious occurrences which will not take them altogether beyond the reach of more ordinary experience."

III

We have given the opinion of scientific men in 1853 and in 1908 with regard to the phenomena of table-turning. Spiritualists to-day are much interested in the experiments of a distinguished Belfast scientist, Dr. W. J. Crawford, with the Goligher family, whose table experiments have satisfied him that "the invisible operators" are "the spirits of human beings who have passed into the beyond." Sir William Barrett, who has personally watched the Belfast experiments, suggests that "many of the physical manifestations witnessed in

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a Spiritualistic séance are the product of human-like, but not really human, intelligences. Good or bad dæmonia they may be; elementals some have called them, which aggregate round the medium—drawn from that particular plane of mental and moral development in the unseen which corresponds to the mental and moral plane of the medium.”

Sir Oliver Lodge, in a recent article,* speaks of “many grades of development” in the other world, “some lower than humanity.”

Mr. Arthur E. Waite, writing more than twenty years ago on Spiritualistic phenomena, set forth the theory of the Kabalists that “shells and elementals,” the “low life deeps of the world of souls,” might exercise a baneful influence on humanity. “The revelations of the unseen world which have come to us through Spiritualism,” he

* *Weekly Dispatch*, May 18th, 1919.

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says, "can have come only from the dregs and lees of the unseen, or, as I should prefer to put it, from the roots and the rudiments of that house which, however, on account of those rudiments, may not be less the House of God."

Scientific students of to-day seem divided between two theories as they examine the table phenomena. These are ascribed (1) to supernormal and little understood powers of the human personality, or (2) to the intervention of irresponsible and, it may be, sub-human intelligences.

Readers of "Raymond" will remember Sir Oliver Lodge's reference to the difficulties of "table-sittings." Various passages show that he himself has been greatly puzzled. Accounts of sittings at "Marie-mont," Sir Oliver Lodge's home, tell of obstreperous doings on the part of the tables. Two got broken, and "a stronger and heavier round table with four legs was

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obtained, and employed only for this purpose." In one of the séances with "Fedá," the alleged spirit of Raymond referred through the "control" to table-doings at Mariemont.

"Other spirits get in, not bad spirits, but ones that like to feel they are helping. The peculiar manifestations are not him, and it only confuses him terribly. Part of it was him, but when the table was careering about it was not him at all. He started it, but something comes along stronger than himself, and he loses the control."*

In a later sitting with the same medium and control we find the sentence (supposed to come from Raymond), "The Indians have got through their hanky-panky." The reference was understood by his brother to mean "playing with the table in a way beyond his control."†

* "Raymond," pp. 182, 183.

† *ibid.*, p. 273, and see also pp. 276-277 for table phenomena.

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Mr. J. Arthur Hill has some sensible remarks on the general subject of table phenomena. "There seems no particular point," he says, "in physical phenomena alone, except as providing a problem for the physicist and psychical researcher. A table or other object may move in some inexplicable way, but that is no proof of 'spirits'; the energy is supplied from physical matter—mainly the medium's and sitters' bodies, apparently—and it is only through evidential messages conveyed by the phenomena that spirit agency can reasonably be inferred." Mr. Hill disapproves of "private circles," except when held for investigation by qualified persons.

Table phenomena, of whatever kind, afford no proof that discarnate human spirits are seeking to communicate with friends on earth.

We close this chapter with the words of Camille Flammarion, the French astronomer,

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whose name is so highly honoured in Spiritualistic circles :—

“ The physical phenomena . . . do not prove the existence of spirits, and may possibly be explained without them . . . that is, by unknown forces, emanating from the experimenters, and especially from the mediums.”

Automatic Writing

The Case Against Spiritualism Chapter VI

AUTOMATIC WRITING

THE Society for Psychical Research has for many years given close attention to the subject of automatic writing. This has been defined as "the faculty possessed by certain people of holding a pencil over a sheet of paper and writing coherent and intelligible sentences without any conscious volition." Sometimes the medium sits entranced with averted face, and the circle looks on while "the moving finger writes." The script, in most cases, purports to emanate from a human being who has passed into the Unseen.

Automatic Writing

I

STANTON MOSES

The most remarkable automatist of the Victorian period was the Rev. William Stainton Moses ("M.A., Oxon"), whose "Spirit Teachings" are still widely read, and whose character was regarded with admiration by men like F. W. H. Myers and Sir W. F. Barrett. Mr. Moses, who was a clergyman of the Church of England, and a master at University College School, revealed to a curious world the existence of a group of "spirits," who concealed their identity, for the most part, under such pseudonyms as "Imperator," "Rector," "Mentor," and "Doctor." It has often been pointed out that the messages of "Imperator," who was a spirit of a highly didactic and clerical turn of mind, were very much what the curate William

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Stainton Moses might have written of his own volition. Their main purpose appears to have been the inculcation of Broad Church theology.

Mr. Podmore considered that Stainton Moses was "perhaps the most remarkable private medium of the last generation," but of his trance utterances this critic said: "They contain no evidence of supernormal faculty."

Mr. Arthur E. Waite, in a passage on automatic script, refers to "that dark border-line of mystery where deception and self-deception meet and join hands."

"It is, indeed, open to question," he says, "whether under some aspects 'the spirit teachings,' for example, obtained through the mediumship of the Rev. Stainton Moses are not, on the whole, more hopeless than the quality of the trance address delivered in a back street on a Saturday night before a circle of mechanics, for the simple

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reason that from the normal gifts of the medium we had fair reason to look for better."

The revelations conveyed through "Spirit Teachings" suggest to this experienced occultist that "if the dead have spoken at any time since the beginning of the Rochester knockings they have said nothing to arrest our attention or to warrant a continued communication." Mr. Podmore, in "Modern Spiritualism," mentions that "Imperator" and his associates were supposed to represent personages of some importance on earth. Their real names were revealed by Stainton Moses to one or two friends. After the migration of these "controls" to Mrs. Piper, "they more than once professed, as a proof of identity, to give their names, but their guesses have been incorrect."

Mr. Podmore thought that the clue to the enigma of Stainton Moses' life "must be

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sought in the annals of morbid psychology.” In justice to the medium it should be added that, while working as a curate in the Isle of Man, he showed remarkable courage and zeal during an outbreak of smallpox, helping to nurse sick and bury the dead. In the various positions he held as parish clergyman and schoolmaster he was liked and respected by all. The physical phenomena of his mediumship were always said to be secondary; his own wish was to emphasise the religious teaching he promulgated through automatic writing.

Spiritualists of to-day reject entirely the notion that the phenomena associated with Stainton Moses were produced by fraud, but as Mr. Hill says, “Whether they were due to spirits is another question, not to be finally settled until we know the extent of our subliminal self’s hidden powers.”

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II

If doubts are felt by Spiritualists themselves with regard to the origin of such a standard work as "Spirit Teachings," can we wonder that all but the most credulous reject great masses of ordinary automatic writing and concentrate their attention on a possibly valuable "residuum"? As Sir William Barrett recognises, the automatist, even when absolutely above suspicion, may unconsciously guide the pencil or the indicator of the "ouija board." May not the explanation of surprising communications, when such occur, be found in "thought-transference from those who are sitting with the medium, or telepathy from other living persons who may know some of the facts that are automatically written?"*

Sir William Barrett asks the question,

* "On the Threshold of the Unseen," pp. 162, 163.

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though he does not consider that an affirmative answer covers the facts. Honest-minded Spiritualists are groping after a natural explanation of the phenomena. The best of them, we are sure, would agree with Dr. Barnes that automatic writing, taken as a whole, has no evidential value in favour of the theory that it is possible to communicate with the dead. As the "table phenomena" point to dimly realised extensions of man's physical powers, so the unexplained facts of automatic writing find their probable explanation in thought-transference, or in that mysterious realm where experts talk of "the dissociation of the personality."

Mr. Gerald Balfour, whose writings on Psychical Research deserve the closest and most attentive study, discussed in the *Hibbert Journal* ten years ago the problem of dissociation, "whereby an element of the normal self may be supposed to become

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in a lesser or greater degree divided off from that self, and to acquire, for the time being, a certain measure of independence."

"It would appear to be with this secondary self (or selves, if there be more than one of them) that we have to reckon in dealing with the facts of automatism rather than with the normal self: a deduction drawn from the consciousness or unconsciousness of the latter may be altogether inapplicable to the former. How ready these second selves are to act a part, and how cleverly they often do so, the experience of hypnotism is there to show."

III

"Nearly every woman," writes Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in "The New Revelation," "is an undeveloped medium. Let her try her own powers of automatic writing." Doctors have cried out against this dangerous advice given by one of the medical

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fraternity, and we have not found it supported by any leading authority in the ranks of Spiritualism. We are able to state, on excellent authority, that the late Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace strongly deprecated any similar attempts by amateurs. In private conversation he used to tell of a man who, having practised automatic writing, became absolutely incapable of writing the simplest note without his hand being used by other agencies. He was not able to hinder this by his own will, and in order to effect a cure he was obliged to abstain for years from using a pencil at all. Dr. Russel Wallace had a strong belief in the existence and activity of malignant low-grade spirits who seek to gain control over men.

Sir William Barrett, in a very grave passage, discourages "young persons and those who have little to interest their time and thoughts" from "making any experiments in this perplexing region." Sir

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Arthur Conan Doyle has never known "a blasphemous, an unkind, or an obscene message" to be transmitted ostensibly from the other side. Sir W. F. Barrett has been less fortunate in his experience. "It not infrequently happens," writes this great authority, "as some friends of mine found, that after some interesting and veridical messages and answers to questions had been given, mischievous and deceptive communications took place, interspersed with profane and occasionally obscene language. How far the sitters' subliminal self is responsible for this, it is difficult to say; they were naturally disquieted and alarmed, as the ideas and words were wholly foreign to their thoughts, and they threw up the whole matter in disgust."*

Sir Oliver Lodge, in "Raymond" (p. 225), warns his readers against the misapplication of psychic power. His paragraph headed

* "On the Threshold of the Unseen," p. 322.

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“Warning” gleams like a sea-light over sunken rocks. It was with a deep sense of responsibility, we may be sure, and with a consciousness of surrounding danger, that the world-famed scientist wrote these words : “Self-control is more important than any other form of control, and whoever possesses the power of receiving communications in any form should see to it that he remains master of the situation. To give up your own judgment and depend solely on adventitious aid is a grave blunder, and may in the long run have disastrous consequences. Moderation and common sense are required in those who try to utilise powers which neither they nor any fully understand, and a dominating occupation in mundane affairs is a wholesome safeguard.”

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, we believe, stands alone among leading Spiritualistic teachers in his advice that all and sundry should practise planchette-writing. “Such

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practices," as Dr. Barnes remarks, "do little harm to men and women whose minds are healthy; but there is a danger that through them persons whose minds are unstable may develop fixed illusions."*

* "Spiritualism and the Christian Faith," p. 47.

Is there Danger from the Other Side ?

The Case Against Spiritualism Chapter VII

IS THERE DANGER FROM THE OTHER SIDE ?

CANON BARNES, in his excellent pamphlet, "Spiritualism and the Christian Faith," warns the clergy against a line of opposing argument which would commit them to an acceptance of the mediæval system of demonology. We can confirm the testimony of Dr. Barnes that it is not uncommon to hear in Christian pulpits an admission that the medium can receive communications from another world, and to find this admission coupled with the suggestion that these communications are sent by evil spirits. We entirely agree with Dr. Barnes

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that the worst way of attacking Spiritualism is to admit its fundamental claim that communication with "spirits" can be set up, and then to assert that the "spirits" with whom intercourse is established are evil. "Such teaching attempts to combat Spiritualism by a revived belief in demonology." The "danger from the other side" is of a different and more subtle nature. "No one at the present day," writes Mr. Arthur E. Waite, "would desire to submit that a Spiritualist who receives at a séance that which, so far as his knowledge extends, is satisfactory evidence that he is holding some kind of communication with, let us suppose, a departed relative, is in reality being imposed upon by any satanic intelligence according to the conventional view; but it remains that he is assuming throughout the good faith of the other side of life, and that it is incapable of utilising particular means of knowledge in an unscrupulous

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way." Trustworthy teachers of Spiritualism do not, in their own investigations, "assume the good faith of the other side of life." The most serious warnings as to possible dangers to the inquirer come from men of high character and responsible position, who accept the tenets of Spiritualism.

I

The Church has taught in every age that man's soul is engaged in warfare with unseen powers. St. Paul's words in Ephesians vi. 11, 12, are impressively rendered by Dr. Moffatt: "Put on God's armour so as to be able to stand against the stratagems of the devil. For we have to struggle not with blood and flesh, but with the Angelic Rulers, the Angelic Authorities, the potentates of the dark present, the spirit-forces of evil in the heavenly sphere."

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There is no stranger, more disputed, passage in Dante's "Purgatorio" than that in which the poet represents the evil serpent seeking to gain access to the penitents on the lower slopes of the Mount. Sinless they are, but they have not reached the terraces of suffering; they are waiting, pale and humble, for permission to move upward at daybreak, and they sing the compline hymn.

Guardian angels come at once to the defence of those whose rest in the flowery dell is disturbed by thoughts of the adversary. These angels, as Maria Rossetti says, are "green-winged and robed for hope, golden-haired and radiant-visaged for glory, with fiery swords against the lurking serpent, with blunted swords towards the reposing elect, falcons to watch, falcons to fly, moved swifter than seen to move."

Those penitents of Dante's "Dell of Princes" would have echoed the words with

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which John Bunyan closed the first part of the "Pilgrim's Progress": "I saw that there was a way to hell even from the gates of heaven, as well as from the city of destruction." Would they not, as the dawn-light guided them upward to St. Peter's gate, have warned Christian souls on earth against any tampering with "spirit-forces of evil" ?

"Principalities and powers,
Mustering their unseen array,
Wait for thy unguarded hours ;
Watch and pray."

II

Mental and moral wreckage may be the fate of those who surrender the will in a vain attempt to lift the curtain of unseen realms. It was an ancient belief that evil spirits could not obtain a footing in any house unless the inmate gave them a deliberate invitation to enter. "Reverend father," says Magdalen in "The Abbot,"

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“hast thou never heard that there are spirits powerful to rend the walls of a castle asunder when once admitted, which yet cannot enter the house unless they are invited, nay, dragged, over the threshold ? ” We remember how Coleridge uses the same superstition in the mysterious fragment, “Christabel” :

“The lady sank, belike thro’ pain,
And Christabel with might and main
Lifted her up, a weary weight,
Over the threshold of the gate :
Then the lady rose again,
And moved as she were not in pain.”

“It is prudent,” says Camille Flammarion, “not to give oneself exclusively to occult subjects, for one might soon lose the independence of mind necessary to form an impartial judgment.”

III

Impressive warnings as to possible dangers from the other side have come from

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leading spiritualists who have not separated themselves from the Christian faith. It will not be the fault of Sir William Barrett if foolish and credulous séance-haunters get into deep waters. In the latest edition of his standard book he reprints, with slight modification, an often cited passage which he wrote more than ten years ago.

“Certainly,” he says, “the Apostle Paul, in the Epistle to the Ephesians, points to a race of spiritual creatures, not made of flesh and blood, inhabiting the air around us, and able injuriously to affect mankind. Good as well as mischievous agencies doubtless exist in the unseen ; this, of course, is equally true if the phenomena are due to those who have once lived on the earth. ‘There are as great fools in the spirit world as there ever were in this,’ as Henry More said over 200 years ago. In any case, granting the existence of a spiritual world,

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it is necessary to be on our guard against the invasion of our will by a lower order of intelligence and morality.”

It is the danger to the will, fully recognised and acknowledged, which leads Sir Oliver Lodge and others to press on students of Spiritualism the need for a primary absorption in worldly affairs. Camille Flammarion, the chief French authority, urges the same view. “There are foods and drinks,” he says, “which it is most wholesome to take only in small quantities.” After a lifetime devoted to the study of mediumship, this brilliant Frenchman thought that three principles only were established :

(1) The soul exists as a real entity independent of the body.

(2) It is endowed with faculties still unknown to science.

(3) It is able to act at a distance without the intervention of the senses.

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IV

Passing, then, from the first part of our subject, we may summarise as follows :—

(1) The past of Spiritualism is deeply tainted with fraud, and the present is “clouded with a doubt.” There may have been unconscious cheating, but there has been much deliberate roguery.

(2) Even where fraud seems to be eliminated, it is probable that the unexplained phenomena of mediumship will become clear as a wider knowledge is gained of man’s physical and mental powers. “I hold,” says Dr. Barnes, “that all the well-attested evidence, on which the theory of spirit-communication is based, will ultimately be explained by a fuller knowledge of the interchange of consciousness between living persons.”

(3) We reject the crude theory that

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mediumistic phenomena are caused by diabolic intervention.

(4) We believe that mental and moral ruin may result from "borderland" studies, because in these the personality is peculiarly liable to the loss of will-power and self-control. "We shall do well to keep the doors of the soul shut until we can open them to God."

Spiritualism and Christianity

The Case Against Spiritualism Chapter VIII

SPIRITUALISM AND CHRISTIANITY

SPIRITUALISM, a recent writer* says, is more and more proving itself a rival to Christianity. Its votaries cease, almost invariably, to be Christians in any traditional sense of the word. It grips the mind of "dabblers" with an extraordinary fascination, and "seems to demand a self-surrender as great as that which Christianity itself involves, a surrender of the whole personality."

We propose to ask in this chapter, "What is the attitude of Spiritualist teachers

* Rev. Cyril E. Hudson in *The Nineteenth Century and After*, May, 1919.

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towards the Christian faith ? ” An exceptional position, let us remark at the outset, is occupied by two of the leaders, Sir W. F. Barrett and Sir Oliver Lodge. The former regards the evidence afforded at the séance as “ a *handmaid to faith,” and warns beginners “ against making a religion of Spiritualism.”*

Sir Oliver Lodge, as we know from his writings, has a sincere reverence for the Person of our Lord. He is convinced that grades of being exist, not only lower in the scale than man, but higher also, grades of every order of magnitude from zero to infinity. Among these lofty beings “ is One on whom the right instinct of Christianity has always lavished heartfelt reverence and devotion. Those who think that the day of the Messiah is over are strangely mistaken ; it has hardly begun. . . . Whatever the Churches may do, I believe that

* “ On the Threshold of the Unseen,” pp. 25, 33, 34.

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the call of Christ himself will be heard and attended to, by a large part of humanity in the near future, as never yet it has been heard or attended to on earth. . . . My own time down here is getting short ; it matters little ; but I dare not go till I have borne this testimony to the grace and truth which emanate from that divine Being.”*

There is something characteristic in the question asked by the bereaved father at an “ automatic ” séance reported in “ Raymond ” :

“ O. J. L. : Before you go, Raymond, I want to ask a serious question. Have you been let to see Christ ? ”

“ Father, I shall see him presently. It is not time yet.”

Intercourse with the departed means for Sir Oliver Lodge “ nothing less than the possibility some day of a glance or a word of approval from the eternal Christ.”

* “ Raymond,” p. 376.

Spiritualism and Christianity

I

A different world opens upon us as we examine the general literature of Spiritualism. Its "Seven Principles" have been set forth as follows : *

I. The Fatherhood of God.

II. The Brotherhood of Man.

III. Continuous Existence.

IV. Communion of Spirits and Ministry of Angels.

V. Personal Responsibility.

VI. Compensation and Retribution Hereafter for good or ill done on earth.

VII. A path of endless progression.

The name of our Lord is not mentioned, yet these "principles" would be words of little meaning but for His life on earth, His

* The pamphlet with the title "The Seven Principles of Spiritualism," by the Secretary of the Spiritualists' National Union, is quoted by Mr. Hill in "Spiritualism," p. 144.

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death, His resurrection, and His glorious reign. It was He who taught us to say "Our Father." New ideas were poured by Him into the Roman world. "One is your teacher, and you are all brothers."* "The King will answer them, 'I tell you truly, in so far as you did it to one of these brothers of mine, even to the least of them, you did it to me.'"[†] The Risen Saviour said on Easter morning, "Go to my brothers and tell them 'I am ascending to my Father and yours, to my God and yours.'"[‡] Though exalted far above all heavens, "He is not ashamed to call them brothers."[§] His followers believe in the communion of saints. The ministry of angels is not strange to them, since "angels came and ministered to Him." His teaching on responsibility, compensation and retribution

* St. Matt. xxiii. 8. † St. Matt. xxv. 40. ‡ St. John xx. 17. § Hebrews ii. 11 (Dr. Moffatt's translation of each text).

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is the highest yet vouchsafed to mankind. If continuous existence is the master-chord of Spiritualism, it was He who brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel, who showed to dying men the path of life. Why, then, is His name omitted from the "Seven Principles" of Spiritualism? The challenge cannot be put aside. The question goes sounding through the ages to every new discipleship, "What think ye of Christ?"

II

Impatience and annoyance seem to be roused in certain Spiritualists when the question is put to them. Mr. J. Arthur Hill, in the concluding pages of his best-known volume,* refers to the complaint of "a clerical reviewer of a recent book of

* "Spiritualism: Its History, Phenomena, and Doctrine," pp. 256-260.

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mine . . . that I nowhere stated my belief regarding Christ."

"It seemed a curious objection," he goes on, "and it had not occurred to me that anyone would expect Christology in a book mainly describing psychical investigations." He refers to "technical theological details on which I am incompetent to pronounce," and adds that "Spiritualists seem for the most part to be uninterested in the subtleties of the Trinitarian doctrine. All venerate the person and teaching of Jesus."

The writer expresses his own belief that "Jesus may have belonged to some order higher than ours." "I admit," he says, "that I have felt this about Emerson. . . . Consequently, I sympathise with those who, being rightly humble about their own persons, but rating others and human possibilities in general too low, feel the necessity of regarding Jesus as more than man."

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It is strange that a writer of Mr. Hill's intelligence should forget that we are living in a Christian land, and that Spiritualism professes to bring new certainties about the future life to those whose hope and anchor on futurity has hitherto rested wholly in the Christian faith. He goes as far as he possibly can to meet the inquiries of Christian readers, but evidently thinks it unfair that they should tease him. That is the surprising thing.

Take in contrast the language of James Smetham, when he was studying the Epistle to the Hebrews: "The great difference of such a subject from all others is that all the interests of Time and Eternity are wrapped up in it. The scrutiny of a title-deed of £100,000 a year is nothing to it. How should it be? Is there a Christ? Is He the heir of all things? Was He made flesh? Did He offer the all-perfect sacrifice? Did He supersede the old order of

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priests ? Is He the Mediator of a new and better covenant ? What are the terms of that covenant ? There are no questions like these. All other interests seem low, trivial, momentary.’’

III

Two affirmations meet us on the threshold of the Gospels. One is the assertion of our Lord’s Divinity, which Mr. Gladstone called “the only hope of our poor wayward human race.” “Immanuel, God with us,” has been the conquering cry of Christian ages. “The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us ; and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

The other is the proclamation that a Redeemer had come to Sion. “Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins.”

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What is the attitude of Spiritualism towards these central truths ?

IV

THE DIVINITY OF OUR LORD

We need say little about the controversy on the Divine Nature of our Lord which has broken out in the ranks of Spiritualism. The difference was proclaimed in a letter to *Light** by the Rev. F. Fielding-Ould, a London clergyman, who is himself a Spiritualist, and whose writings are recommended by Sir A. Conan Doyle. "No one," says this clergyman, "has a right to call himself a Christian unless he believes in the Divinity of Jesus Christ. He may be a person of estimable character, and greatly developed spirituality, but he is not a *Christian*." On

* July 12th, 1919. Some of the letters printed in *Light* during subsequent weeks are very instructive, and confirm the view of Mr. Fielding Ould as to a widespread division in the ranks.

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the truth of our Lord's Divinity the Church is erected. "Take it away, and the whole elaborate structure falls into ruins. It is upon that rock that the great vessel of modern Spiritualism is in imminent danger of being wrecked. . . . In the Spiritualist hymn-book the name of Jesus is deleted—*e.g.*, 'angels of Jesus' reads 'angels of wisdom.' At their services His name is carefully omitted in the prayers, and the motto of very many is, 'Every man his own priest and his own saviour.' Christian Spiritualists, who rejoice in many of the revelations of the séance room, are alarmed. They are quite prepared to allow every man to make his own decision, but that the movement as a whole should be identified with Theism, and that they themselves should be considered as having renounced their faith and hope in Jesus Christ is intolerable."

Mr. Fielding-Ould adds that Spiritualism

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is "utterly discredited and condemned" if it can be shown that "the communicating spirits are the authors of and responsible for this anti-Christian tendency." His language is that of a man who has been misled through ignorance, and who has been brought up sharply on the edge of a precipice.

There never was a time when the Church of England, and all the Christian Churches of this country, accepted with firmer conviction the language of the Te Deum and of the Nicene Creed. "Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ. Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father."

"I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God."

If mockers within the fold of Spiritualism cry contemptuously, "You are uttering language far beyond the range of mortal

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understanding," the Christian knows that the reality is indeed far beyond his finite apprehension. He looks up and says with St. Thomas, "My Lord and my God."

V

THE SAVIOUR FROM SIN

The witness of the Christian heart confirms the testimony of the human race in all ages that a Saviour is needed. It is not only the races influenced by Hebrew literature who have shared the consciousness of sin. A modern scholar quotes from an Egyptian hymn to Amon, Lord of Thebes, helper of the poor :

"Though the servant be wont to commit sin, yet is the Lord wont to be gracious. The Lord of Thebes spends not the whole day wroth. If he be wroth for the space of a moment it endureth not—turns to us in graciousness. Amon turns with his

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breath.”* The cry for mercy rises from the oldest literature of Hinduism. An ancient Vedic hymn has these words, “Without thee, O Varuna, I am not the master even of the twinkling of an eye. Do not deliver us unto death, though we have offended against thy commandments day by day. Accept our sacrifices, forgive our offences. Let us speak together again like old friends.”†

A saint of Buddhism, the noble Lama from Tibet, is represented by Rudyard Kipling as a pilgrim seeking for the River which washes away sin.

As buried civilisations gradually yield up their treasures to the explorer, the cry is heard without need of sound or language : “If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is

* Professor Breasted, “Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt,” p. 352.

† Quoted by Max Muller.

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forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared." How is it that Spiritualism cannot hear that *De Profundis*? Spiritualism is without a message for the penitent, for it knows nothing of a Divine Redeemer. There is a harshness and shallowness in its conceptions of the future state, except in so far as these are influenced by Christianity. General Drayson said to Sir A. Conan Doyle, "You have not got the fundamental truth into your head. That truth is, that every spirit in the flesh passes over to the next world exactly as it is, with no change whatever. This world is full of weak or foolish people. So is the next."

Compare such words with the language of the Burial Service. Spirits do not always pass away at their best and truest. Long illness may have clouded the perceptions, infirmities of old age may deface the character, there may come at the last

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“fightings and fears within, without.” Père Gratry tells us that the young priest, Henri Perreyve, one of the bravest and best of men, cried twice in his dying hour, “*J’ai peur*” (“I am afraid”), as if he saw the Arch-Fear confronting him in visible form. Deep knowledge of the human heart lies behind the words of the Prayer Book: “Spare us, Lord most holy, O God most mighty, O holy and merciful Saviour, Thou most worthy Judge eternal, suffer us not, at our last hour, for any pains of death, to fall from Thee.” To the latest moment of life and beyond it the soul has no resting-place except in the Rock of Ages. “The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness.” The burden of sin drops away, and the pilgrim, as he passes over, may say, as in the hour of his conversion, “He hath given me rest by His sorrow and life by His death.”

But Sir Arthur Conan Doyle thinks that

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in "conventional Christianity" "too much seemed to be made of Christ's death." "The death of Christ, beautiful as it is in the Gospel narrative," he says again, "has seemed to assume an undue importance, as though it were an isolated phenomenon for a man to die in pursuit of a reform." "In my opinion," he goes on, "far too much stress has been laid upon Christ's death, and far too little upon His life. That was where the true grandeur and the true lesson lay." . . . "It was this most wonderful and uncommon life, and not His death, which is the true centre of the Christian religion."*

Spiritualism, in a word, does not wish to face the Cross. The "spirit-guides" talk vaguely of a "Christ-Spirit," whose special care is the earth. There is nothing in their report of Atonement or Redemption. As Dr. Jowett has pointed out, the "New

* "The New Revelation," pp. 72-74.

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Revelation " has much to say on our Lord Jesus Christ as a "medium." It says nothing of Him as Mediator. It offers fellowship with discarnate human personalities, but has no longing for fellowship with the Risen Lord. The ideas of the "spirit-guides" on prayer are set forth by Sir A. Conan Doyle in "The New Revelation." The "spirits" declare that "no religion upon earth has any advantage over another, but that character and refinement are everything. At the same time, they are also in agreement that all religions which inculcate prayer and an upward glance rather than eyes for ever on the level are good. In this sense, and in no other—as a help to spiritual life—every form may have a purpose for somebody."*

The cardinal doctrines of the faith are rejected by Spiritualists. Man is not regarded in their creed as "a sinner saved

* "The New Revelation," p. 100.

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by grace." Many cannot understand, Sir A. Conan Doyle tells us, such expressions as "redemption from sin," "cleansed by the blood of the Lamb." But the Christian says from his heart :

"Grace and life eternal
In that Blood I find.
Blest be His compassion,
Infinitely kind."

"The mystic life leads no one from the life of the Church." The contrary is true of Spiritualism.

Quality of the Alleged Messages

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QUALITY OF THE ALLEGED MESSAGES

WHEN a Spiritualist tells us that he receives messages from discarnate human beings through the medium and the medium's "control" certain questions immediately arise. "Of what nature are these messages? What have you learned from them? How have they affected your judgment of this world and the next? Are they likely to help mankind in its upward progress?"

I

A twofold answer reaches us from within the ranks of Spiritualism.

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(1) At an early stage of the inquiry, as Mr. A. E. Waite points out, the belief was accepted that "life for man on the other side of the screen of material things was, specifically, neither better nor worse than our own . . . it was so entirely human, with all the folly that resides in humanity."

Spiritualist leaders of to-day would not dispute that point. "Yes, of course," they would say, "it is always possible that the inquirer may get in touch with 'naughty boys' on the other side. The spirit passes over just as it was on earth. Bad influences as well as good are present in every séance." Sir Arthur Conan Doyle has said plainly: "We have, unhappily, to deal with absolute cold-blooded lying on the part of wicked or mischievous intelligences. Every one who has investigated the matter has, I suppose, met with examples of wilful deception, which

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occasionally are mixed up with good and true communications.”

Aside from wilful deception, there seems to be a certain mocking malevolence, where we should least expect it, on the part of the supposed spirits. “We do not want to make it too easy for you” is a strange utterance from the other side to bereaved parents.*

Speaking at Manchester on May 28, 1919, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle reported a singular experience of his own in Glasgow a few weeks earlier.

“I had to address a very large meeting,” he said, “exactly double the size of this one, and in the morning I went to a séance; we had a number of wonderful manifestations, and finally we had a message sent in a direct voice. The message which came to me was: ‘You are going to have a very good meeting to-night.’ I said, ‘Thank

* “Raymond,” p. 121.

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you.' The voice then said, 'It won't be quite the same as you are accustomed to; we have a little surprise for you.' I said, 'Not unpleasant, I hope?' They just chuckled at that, and that was all I got." When the lecturer faced his audience everything he had intended to say passed entirely out of his head. Preachers and platform orators can tell something of the agony of that experience, which has not infrequently been the premonitory symptom of a nervous illness. "I don't know how long I stood; I suppose about a minute, though it seemed like a week, and all the time I was struggling in the endeavour to find something to say." The lecturer recovered himself, and all went well; but is there not here a parallel with the Celtic superstition that the powers of nature are malicious, and will do us a bad turn if they can? Alexander Smith writes of "that sense of an evil will, and an alienation from

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man in nature," which is found in ancient fragments of Scottish river-lore.

(2) A cautious attitude might seem advisable under such conditions, and we are surprised to note a tendency on the part of our newer Spiritualist teachers to dogmatise on theological matters. "Spirit Teachings," by Stainton Moses, has become a sort of Bible to the sect. Sir Oliver Lodge reprints passages from it in "Raymond." Sir Arthur Conan Doyle takes the rubbish received through "Imperator" and his fellows with the utmost seriousness, though the genius which created Sherlock Holmes has not otherwise been dulled in psychical studies. Sir Arthur is quick enough to criticise the famous "cross-correspondence" analysed by Mr. Gerald Balfour in "The Ear of Dionysius." Two eminent Greek scholars, Professor Verrall and Professor Butcher, are supposed to have collaborated to produce a Greek problem.

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“It may be remarked, in passing,” says Sir A. Conan Doyle, “that these and other examples show clearly, either that the spirits have the use of an excellent reference library, or else that they have memories which produce something like omniscience. No human memory could possibly carry all the exact quotations which occur in such communications as ‘The Ear of Dionysius.’”

The Churches must, however, in Sir Arthur’s view, accept the tenets of Spiritualism or perish.

II

Impartial students of the literature—a growing mass of documentary evidence—are impressed (1) by the triviality of the messages. Punsters would seem to carry on their jokes from the other side. A message which was presumed to come to Mrs. Holland from Myers contained a mysterious allusion to “a peck of pickled pepper.”

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In the opinion of the best S.P.R. critics the words conveyed a punning allusion to Mrs. Piper. Is there not something pitiable in the thought that the great writer who gave us "St. Paul" and the "Classical" and "Modern" Essays should be occupied in the unseen life in trying to transmit to earth punning references to the name of a medium? Professor William James remarked on the extreme triviality of the supposed communications.

"What real spirit," he wrote, "at last able to revisit his wife on this earth, but would find something better to say than that she had changed the place of his photograph? And yet that is the sort of remark to which the spirits introduced by the mysterious Phinuit are apt to confine themselves."

A woman writer passed away not long ago in early middle life. Her mother tried to get in touch through a medium with

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the departed spirit, and received a message to the effect that some valuable old lace had been forgotten in the top drawer of a tallboy, and that it ought to be taken out and washed ! In a recent newspaper article by an eminent Spiritualist, reference was made to a supposed authentic communication lately received from the other side. It concerned a pair of grey suède shoes and a fountain pen.

Spiritualists tell us that such "trivial fond records" as we find, for instance, in "Raymond," are of more value as evidence than graver talk of a general kind. Sir Oliver Lodge says, for instance, "The idea that a departed friend ought to be occupied wholly and entirely with grave matters, and ought not to remember jokes and fun, is a gratuitous claim which has to be abandoned. Humour does not cease with earth life. Why should it ?"*

* "Raymond," p. 349.

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With the utmost respect, we reply that Sir Oliver misses the point. The solemn platitudes of "Imperator" are, if possible, even less convincing than the descriptions of life in the unseen world given in "Raymond," over which Mr. Wells makes merry in "The Undying Fire." Why is it that the outpourings of Spiritualism almost invariably, as Dr. Barnes points out, "reflect the commonplace thoughts of commonplace minds" ?

If spirits were indeed communicating with men from within the veil, would not their language bear some trace of the mighty change they have undergone ? Mr. Birrell, in one of his Bristol speeches, raised a question which must occur to every thoughtful inquirer. "The records of Spiritualism," he said, "leave me unconvinced. They lack the things of morality, of grandeur, of emotion ; in a word, of religion. They deal with petty things,

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mere prolonged egoism, as if the one thing we want to be assured of is continued existence, and an endless capacity to exchange platitudes. A revelation of the life beyond the grave ought surely, if it is to do any good in the world, to be more stupendous than that—something of really first-class importance. Otherwise we are just as well without it.”

(2) Among Spiritualists themselves we hear constant discussion as to the singular failure of the “spirits” to give names. Dr. L. P. Jacks examines this problem in the *Journal* of the S.P.R. for May, 1919.*

He had been “struck by the fact that a spirit who manifested his former personal appearance with great accuracy, even to minute details, was yet apparently unable

* In an article entitled “Personal Appearance of the Departed,” *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, May, 1919.

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to manifest his name, except in an imperfect and doubtful manner." Why was his old coat manifested and his name not ?

" Our names, while unessential to our self-consciousness, do play a prominent part in our sensible experience, especially with those of us who are cursed with an interminable correspondence, and one would think that a mind returning to its old tracks, as Sir Oliver Lodge suggests the spirits do, would find his name one of the easiest things to pick out."

Professor Jacks is disposed to find a solution of the puzzle in telepathy. " It is easier," he says, " to understand how a telepathist, having succeeded in reading one part of my mind, should fail or omit to read another, than it is to understand how an educated man in the other life should be able to reproduce his coat, but unable to trace the letters of his own name."

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The failure of the "spirits" to give names is a highly suspicious fact. How is it, asks Dr. Jacks, that the "control" which reproduces through the medium long messages as given by the communicating spirit, should fail to "catch" the name, in spite of the effort of all parties to get it through ?*

* *Journal*, May, 1919, p. 28.

The Churches and the Séance

The Case Against Spiritualism Chapter X

THE CHURCHES AND THE SÉANCE

THE late Dr. Amory Bradford, one of the most eminent leaders of American Congregationalism, caused something of a sensation eleven years ago when he urged the students of Hackney College, Hampstead, to occupy themselves with psychical matters. Not a few of the younger Congregational ministers can recall that strange hour in the library when Dr. Bradford seemed to challenge the Churches with the names of Sir Oliver Lodge, Sir William Crookes, and Dr. Russel Wallace. "These learned scientists," he argued, "are trying

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to lift the fringe of the dark veil, and you young ministers ought to show an equal eagerness." In the American Churches, he said, people were asking their pastors : "Cannot you reveal to us the secret of the world beyond the grave ? Our scientific men are occupied with psychical research ; what are you ministers doing ? Ought not every divinity student to have his attention directed early to these occult mysteries which laymen are discussing in the privacy of their own homes ?" As the audience streamed into the lobbies, it was admitted that no more surprising address had been delivered of late years in a London theological college. When the twilight of the June evening enwrapped the departing company, many must have been wondering, with Dr. Garvie, how the students were to find time for such highly-specialised and laborious researches as those conducted by the Psychical Society.

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The Principals of our theological institutions are level-headed men, and they did not see their way to provide a dark-room for the séance, as hotels supply a dark-room for the amateur photographer. The Churches have rejected the proposal that they should enter into competition with the experts on whom it falls to investigate the phenomena of Spiritualism. Is their refusal based on cowardice? Very far from it. Sir Walter Scott, in “The Monastery,” has shown us once for all how a great Christian, before the dawn of modern science, met the onset of what seemed to him a supernatural being. When the Monk Eustace was challenged by the White Lady in the Vale of Glendearg, he answered in words which Christian teachers would use to-day, were a similar demand made upon them :

“In the name of *My Master*,” said the astonished monk, “that name before which

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all things created tremble, I conjure thee to say what thou art that hauntest me thus.
. . . . At the crook of the glen ? I could have desired to avoid a second meeting, but I am on the service of the Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against me."

On negative and on positive grounds the Churches decline to lift the gauntlet thrown down to them by Spiritualism.

I

(1) They note, in the first place, that the challenge comes in language of insult from some of their deadliest foes.

That well-known Spiritualist teacher, Professor James H. Hyslop, Secretary of the American Society for Psychical Research, denounced the Church for its " fatal genius in allying itself with decadent causes." " The self-confidence of science," he wrote, " is directly proportioned to the despair of

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religion. The ministry do not know what creed is safe to believe or assert, and the churches have become social clubs, and talk about the poor as an excuse for an existence that, so far as social efficiency is concerned, can as well be supplied by literature and art." Enemies of the Church, who view with contempt her action throughout the Christian ages, are among the very people who are urging her ministers to become Spiritualists.

(2) Christian ministers have not the training, capacity, or experience requisite for the detection of conjuring tricks, which may account for the phenomena in a séance.

We may quote these propositions formulated by the late Mr. Frank Podmore in his "Studies in Psychical Research" :

(a) "The conditions under which the phenomena generally occur—conditions for the most part suggested and continually enforced by the medium—are such as to facilitate fraud and to render its detection difficult.

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(b) "Almost all the phenomena are known to have been produced under similar conditions by mechanical means.

(c) "Almost every professional medium has been detected in producing results by trickery.

(d) "There are cases on record in which private persons, with no obvious pecuniary or social advantage to secure, have been detected in trickery.

(e) "The conditions of emotional excitement in which investigators have for the most part approached the subject . . . are calculated seriously to interfere with cold and dispassionate observation."

The above passage is none the less impressive because it was written more than twenty years ago. The task of examination belongs to those who, while fully acquainted with the records of the past, possess the knowledge and trained powers of observation which such investigations require.

II

The Churches have positive duties, and may not turn aside from their chief business.

(1) It is the fashion with Spiritualists to

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write as if their cult were the only alternative to blank Materialism, because they forget that the one sure message about the Unseen has been committed by our Lord Jesus Christ to His servants and friends. The Churches proclaim that message. Christian ministers, like the Shepherds of Bunyan's Delectable Mountains, have in their hands a perspective glass through which the pilgrims may see the gates of the Celestial City. Their teaching, like that of the Shepherds, bears the mark of "other-worldliness," which thirty years ago was applied as a term of reproach to the organised denominations in this country. The Churches can say, in the words of a saintly Wesleyan minister, William Arthur, "The last tunnel is on the east of the land of Beulah, towards the rising of the sun, and opens in face of the golden gate, where are the Shining Ones. How far off it is I cannot tell: the Everlasting Hills are

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covered with a golden haze. Glory be to God.”*

Goethe put the same thought somewhat differently in “Faust”:

“What a cloud of morning hovers
O’er the pine-trees’ tossing hair!
Can I guess what life it covers?
They are spirits young and fair.”

“Then said the Shepherds one to another,
Let us here show to the pilgrims the gates
of the Celestial City, if they have skill to
look through our perspective glass. The
pilgrims then lovingly accepted the motion.
So they had them to the top of a high hill,
called Clear, and gave them their glass to
look.”

The Church possesses to-day the gift of clairvoyance, but she exercises it like the Shepherds on bracing mountain-tops, not in dark and stifling rooms. Her messengers go among the sick, the dying, and the bereaved, speaking of eternal life through Christ.

* In a letter written during his last illness to his friend, Dr. J. H. Rigg.

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(2) The Church has never denied that the blessed dead may in ways unknown to us influence the living and lead them upward. St. Teresa learned much from the devout monk, St. Peter of Alcántara. At the moment of his death, according to Teresa's testimony, he appeared to her in great glory, and said he was going to rest. "It seems to me," she added, "that he consoles me more than when he was here with me."

To the mourning heart the Christian teacher may say in St. Paul's words: "Perhaps he therefore departed from thee for a season that thou mightest receive him for ever."

"Have not we too?—Yes, we have
Answers, and we know not whence;
Echoes from beyond the grave,
Recognised intelligence.

"Such rebounds our inward ear
Catches sometimes from afar;—
Listen, ponder, hold them dear,
For of God, of God they are."*

* Wordsworth.

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As Dr. J. D. Jones has written, “ The dead who are so gloriously alive can hold fellowship with the living who have not yet died. The communion of saints is not to be limited to those who still dwell in this temporal and material world ; it extends to those who have passed to the other side of death. . . . The only way in which we can combat Spiritualism is ourselves to rescue this truth about fellowship from the neglect into which it has fallen—to speak and think in a more Christian way about those who have passed on. . . . ‘ Ye are come to the spirits of just men made perfect.’ ”

The Appeal to Science

The Case Against Spiritualism Chapter XI

THE APPEAL TO SCIENCE

SEVENTY-EIGHT years have passed since Nathaniel Hawthorne warned his future wife, Sophia Peabody, against "the so-called 'magnetic' and 'mesmeric' impostures which prepared the way for an unspiritual Spiritism."* The words of his letter are not obsolete, though written in 1841.

"Take no part, I beseech you," he wrote, "in these magnetic miracles. I am unwilling that a power should be exercised on you of which we know neither the origin

* Introduction to "The Blithedale Romance," p. XIX. (Service & Paton edition).

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nor consequence, and the phenomena of which seem rather calculated to bewilder us than to teach us any truths about the present or future state of being. . . . Supposing that the power arises from the transfusion of one spirit into another, it seems to me that the sacredness of an individual is violated by it ; there would be an intruder into the holy of holies. . . . Without distrusting that the phenomena have really occurred, I think that they are to be accounted for as the result of a material and physical, not of a spiritual influence. . . . And what delusion can be more lamentable and mischievous than to mistake the physical and material for the spiritual ? What so miserable as to lose the soul's true, though hidden, knowledge and consciousness of heaven in the mist of an earth-born vision ? . . . The view which I take of this matter is caused by no want of faith in mysteries, but by a deep

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reverence of the soul and of the mysteries which it knows within itself, but never transmits to the earthly eye and ear. Keep the imagination sane—that is one of the truest conditions of communion with heaven.”

Science has made great advance since Hawthorne wondered whether the phenomena of his “Veiled Lady” foreshadowed “the birth of a new science or the revival of an old humbug.” Is not the public entitled to some indication of the attitude of science toward Spiritualism? Michael Faraday summed up his thoughts, when nearing the end, on a problem he had closely investigated. Answering one who had questioned him about the spirits, the great scientist wrote: “Whenever the spirits can counteract gravity or originate motion, or supply an action due to natural physical force, or counteract any such action; whenever they can punch or prick me, or

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affect my sense of feeling or any other sense, or in any other way act on me without my waiting on them ; or working in the light can show me a hand, either writing or not, or in any way make themselves visibly manifest to me ; whenever these things are done or anything which a conjuror cannot do better ; or, rising to higher proofs, whenever the spirits describe their own nature, and like honest spirits say what they can do, or pretending, as their supporters do, that they can act on ordinary matter, whenever they initiate action, and so make themselves manifest ; whenever by such-like signs they come to me, and ask my attention to them, I will give it. But until some of these things be done, I have no more time to spare for them or their believers, or for correspondence about them.”* Has the science of our day advanced beyond the standpoint of Michael

* Letter of November 4th, 1864.

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Faraday ? In the absence of a united pronouncement, can we define the attitude of modern science towards Spiritualism ?

I

We are impressed at once, as we seek to answer these questions, by the contemptuous indifference of the learned world as a whole. Spiritualists ring the changes on a handful of eminent names. How is it that the leaders of the Psychical Society have not drawn after them a larger following ? Canon Barnes, himself a Doctor of Science, observes that the most distinguished supporters of Spiritualism have not *themselves* received messages which prove the possibility of communication with the dead. The messages have come through others, for the most part professional mediums.* Dr. Barnes recognises that the task of investigation belongs to psychologists,

* "Spiritualism and the Christian Faith" (Longmans), p. 49.

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and he considers it "significant, that practically none of the leading experimental psychologists of the world are prepared to accept the theory of spirit-communication." "Nor is it accepted," he goes on, "by leading medical men, whose careful study of mental disease and experiments with abnormal mental states, would permit them to speak with authority. So long as such experts refuse to accept the spiritualistic explanation of the observed phenomena, it is mere superstition for the mass of men to do so."*

Ought not the public to know, through some clear and simple statement, where the medical profession stands with regard to Spiritualism? The voice of authority should be heard in difficult times.

II

Camille Flammarion, speaking fifty years ago at the grave of Allan Kardec, the French

* "Spiritualism and the Christian Faith" (Longmans), p. 56.

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apostle of Spiritualism, used language which might almost seem justified in view of modern discoveries. "When we compare our small knowledge and the narrow limits of our sphere of perception with the vast mass of that which really exists," he says, "we can hardly avoid the conclusion that we do not really know anything, and that all true knowledge lies in the future." The phenomena of Spiritualism to the French astronomer look like twinkling stars in the Milky Way of science. Thomas Hardy, in "Two on a Tower," dwells on man's sense of infinite littleness as he confronts the stellar universe. "I often experience a kind of fear of the sky after sitting in the observing chair a long time," says Swithin St. Cleeve to Lady Constantine. "And when I walk home afterwards I also fear it, for what I know is there, but cannot see, as one naturally fears the presence of a vast formless

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something that only reveals a very little of itself.”*

“Patience and equanimity” are the watchwords of true science. Wordsworth, in his poem “Star-Gazers,” notes the bitter disappointment of the crowd which looked through the telescope in Leicester Square. Fee in hand, they had come to behold the wonders of the heavenly spaces, but show-man or implement failed to answer their desires.

“Whatever be the cause, 'tis sure that they who
pry and pore
Seem to meet with little gain, seem less happy
than before ;
One after one they take their turn, nor have I
one espied
That doth not slackly go away as if dissat-
isfied.”

A similar disappointment awaits the pushing crowd which gazes through the telescope of Spiritualism. “Have patience,” say the masters of science, “we are only on

* “Two on a Tower,” ch. viii.

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the threshold of knowledge. In a single generation we have added two vast provinces to the human spirit. By wireless telegraphy we have turned the farthest ocean solitudes into man's whispering gallery. In conquering the air we have revolutionised the course of history."

Can we doubt that from the wonderful works of God, no less than from His holy Word, new light and truth will yet break forth for humanity? Science is prepared for extensions of man's physical and mental powers which will put to shame the phenomena of Spiritualism. We are living in a transitional epoch, and faith alone can support the soul as it beats the prison bars, knowing not how or when the sentence of its liberation may be spoken.

"I wait, my soul doth wait,
For Him who on His shoulder bears the key;
I sit fast bound and yet not desolate,
My mighty Lord is free."*

* Dora Greenwell.

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“ O Key of David, and Sceptre of the house of Israel, Thou that openest, and no man shutteth, and shuttest, and no man openeth, come and bring the prisoner out of his prison house.”

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